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COVER PICTURE

Caspar Schott's *Physica Curiosa*

J. Francisco Salomão

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Caspar Schott, who was born in Königshofen, in the diocese of Würtzburg, in 1608, was a Jesuit, a mathematician, physicist, and pedagogue. He first studied at the University of Würzburg, but during the Thirty-Year War, he left the Holy Roman Empire and finished his studies at the University of Palermo, Sicily. Thirty years later, he returned to Würzburg where he taught and wrote until his death in 1666. The works of Schott include writings on hydraulics, optics, and mathematics. However, his most curious work was *Physica Curiosa*, first published in 1662.

Physica Curiosa [1] is a summary of all natural monstrosities known at that time, including bizarre animals and physical abnormalities. It was certainly the book with the most visual impact and one of the most densely illustrated of the many "books of curiosities" that flourished during the 16th and 17th centuries. The book includes descriptions and depictions of exotic animals such as elephants, giraffes, and jaguars, scarcely known at that time. The book described also mythological creatures such as satyrs, mermaids, winged dragons, and centaurs, whose existence was considered credible by Schott's contemporaries. *Physica Curiosa* was largely a compendium of reports Schott had received or books he had read, and many of the images displayed in it had been used in earlier books and

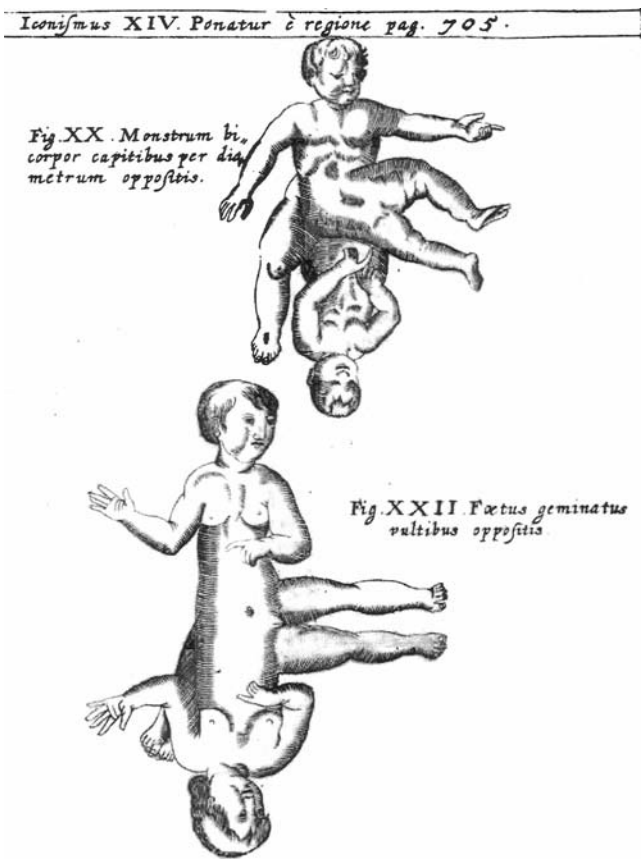
Iconiſmus XIV. Ponatur è regione pag. 705.
Fig. XX. Monſtrum bi, corpor capitibus per diametrum oppoſitis.
Fig. XXII. Fœtus geminatus vultibus oppoſitis

Fig. 1 *Monstrum bicorpus capitis*, depicting two examples of conjoined twins

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Fig. 2 *Homo pedibus aversis*, showing a young man with club feet

often represented creatures that the sailors or travelers described.

From the medical point of view, part of *Physica Curiosa* resembled a textbook of teratology where aberrations such as brachial amelia, parasitic and conjoined twins (Fig. 1) are described. One of the engravings (*homo pedibus aversis*) shows a young man with club feet (Fig. 2), and at the lower left of the cover illustration (Fig. 3), one can distinguish an abdominal wall defect (*Infans aperto ventre*) associated with leg and foot deformities, probably a case of OEIS complex.

In the Middle and Modern Ages, monstrosities were often seen as a premonitory sign of some extraordinary event, and before and after Schott's work, authors like Ambroise Paré, Ulisse Aldrovandi, and Conrad Lycostenes, dealt with human deformities not as something abhorrent but as something intellectually exciting [2]. As the people of the period were morbidly interested in anomalies, and their description frequently mingled a little accuracy with a lot of fantasy, human "monsters" are identified, without any doubt inspired in deforming disease and congenital anomalies.

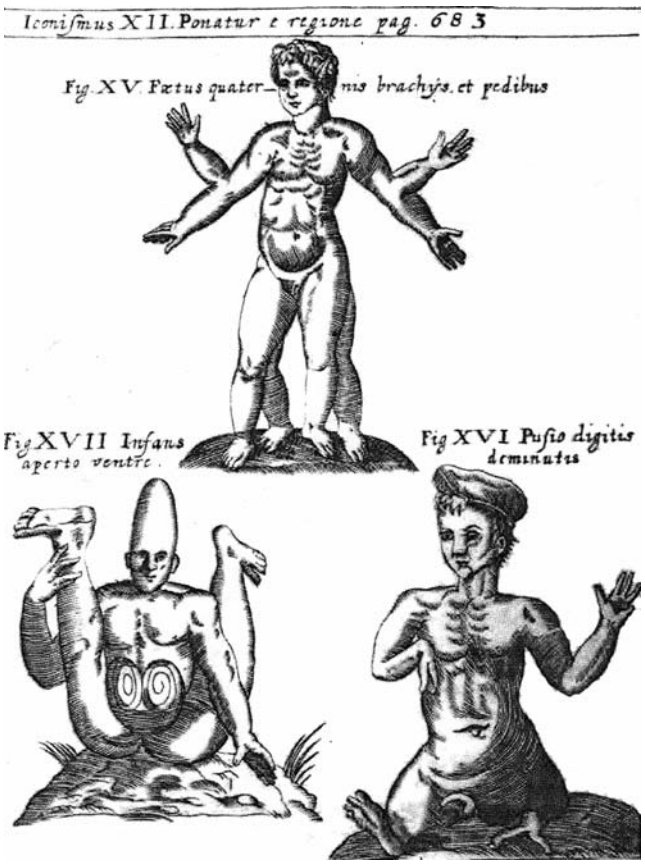
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Fig. XV. Fœtus quater-mis brachijs. et pedibus
Fig XVII Infans aperto ventre.
Fig XVI Pusio digitis deminutus

Fig. 3 Cover illustration

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